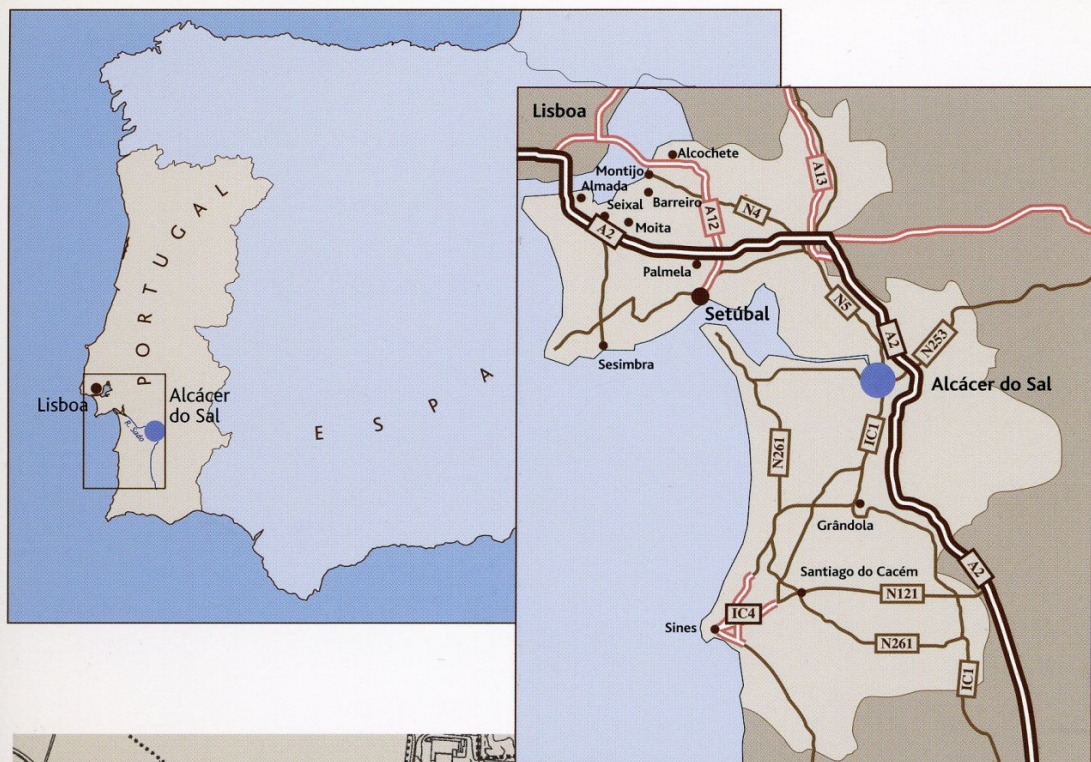




Guide

Alcácer do Sal Castle
Archaeological Crypt





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SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION	Maria Filomena Barata (<i>Direcção Regional de Évora / IPPAR</i>)
EDITORIAL COORDINATION	Jorge Vila Nova Alves (<i>Departamento de Estudos / IPPAR</i>) Miguel Soromenho (<i>Departamento de Estudos / IPPAR</i>)
EDITING	Paulo Pereira
RESEARCH AND TEXTS	António Cavaleiro Paixão (<i>Direcção Regional de Lisboa / IPPAR</i>) Esmeralda Gomes (<i>Direcção Regional de Lisboa / IPPAR</i>) Frederico Tatá Regala (<i>Direcção Regional de Lisboa / IPPAR</i>) António Rafael Carvalho (<i>Câmara Municipal de Alcácer do Sal</i>) João Carlos Faria (<i>Câmara Municipal de Alcácer do Sal</i>)
TRANSLATION	John Elliott
GRAPHIC DESIGN	Nuno Gonçalves / sentido: designers
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PROJECT FOR THE RECOVERY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CRYPT OF ALCÁÇER DO SAL CASTLE

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION	António Cavaleiro Paixão (<i>IPPAR/DRL</i>) Maria Filomena Barata (<i>IPPAR/DRE</i>)
EXECUTIVE COORDINATION (IPPAR / DE)	Manuel Lacerda Miguel Soromenho Alexandre Braz Mimoso Jorge Vila Nova Alves
GENERAL COORDINATION OF THE WORK ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CRYPT	Alexandre Braz Mimoso (<i>IPPAR/DE</i>)
GENERAL COORDINATION, TECHNICAL EXECUTION AND CONTENT PRODUCTION	Esmeralda Gomes (<i>IPPAR/DRL</i>) Frederico Tátá Regala (<i>IPPAR/DRL</i>)
TECHNICAL SUPPORT	Margarida Santos (<i>Conservation and Restoration/IPPAR/DRL</i>) Margarida Monteiro (<i>Conservation and Restoration/IPPAR/DRL</i>) Teresa Julião <i>IPPAR/DRL</i> (<i>Treatment of the remains and drawing of archaeological structures/IPPAR/DRL</i>) Marco Calado (<i>Drawing of archaeological structures</i>) Susana Rosado (<i>Drawing of archaeological pieces</i>)
COLLABORATION OF ALCÁÇER DO SAL MUNICIPAL COUNCIL	João Carlos Faria † (<i>Roman Period</i>) António Rafael Carvalho (<i>Islamic, Mediaeval Christian and Modern/Contemporary periods</i>) Marisol Aires Ferreira (<i>Convent period</i>) Fernando Soares Gomes (<i>Treatment and Restoration of archaeological pieces</i>) Vitor Cardim (<i>Treatment and Restoration of archaeological pieces</i>)
PROJECT	Canon, Centro de Estudos e Projectos, Lda. Diogo Lino Pimentel Hugo Venade Sentido, Designers Associados, Lda. João Camacho Nuno Gonçalves
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Al-Qasr: The Islamic Alcácer do Sal



The Islamic conquest (8th-10th centuries)

The Islamic domination of the Iberian Peninsula should be understood in the organic framework of the Mediterranean. In other words, "Islamisation" was not just the result of a military invasion begun by Tarik in 711 A.D. or something that was strictly imposed by force. While there was, in fact, an aggressive penetration of armies into the Iberian Peninsula and a capitulation of cities and fortresses over two thirds of its area – representing an unremitting military invasion that conquered land with great ease in the south and centre of present-day Portugal – it is also true that this ample area submitted to the new masters, who showed themselves to be tolerant towards the native inhabitants and their Christian religion.

It is not, therefore, surprising that, after the collapse of the Roman Empire and in a period when there was great fragmentation of the power of the former Germanic and Visigothic Christian kingdoms, these old masters should have

General view of the castle of Alcácer do Sal, seen from the north





Pitcher with decoration type "dry rope technique" from the emirs-caliphal phase (9/10th-century)



Pitcher from the emirs-caliphal phase (9/10th-century)

been replaced by other new ones who negotiated their position of domination. On the other hand, in the southern territories, in the area of Alcácer and the lower Sado valley for example, the oldest settlements and cities were part of a geographical and economic complex that had endured for many centuries, with intense contacts between the East and West, but also with the Maghreb. The process of Islamisation that occurred in the west of the Iberian Peninsula also seems to have been a civilising movement, as we now know today.

In fact, since the 8th century, the south of the territory that was later to become Portugal had been witnessing the progressive implantation of Islam. However, Arabs and Hispano-Romans, Muslims and Christians, all lived together in the cities that rapidly fell under Arab sway between 714 and 716 A.D.. The power of the *caids* and the *walis* (the alcaides and the provincial governors) who governed the city or the territories around them – the *kura* – made itself felt in a military and political manner. The cities were, in fact, the real hotbeds of Islamisation, since their existence depended on productive activities, so that it would have been easy to reach an agreement with the new masters through an essentially diplomatic stance. This attitude of mediation and closer approximation was entirely justified because this was a territory whose links

with the Mediterranean Arc dated back to the Roman civilisation, later passing through a period of Byzantine influence. Continuity is therefore what is most noted in this universe, to which Alcácer do Sal belonged. The process of Islamisation in the west of the Iberian Peninsula consequently seems to have been a civilising movement, for which there existed a favourable set of circumstances and an opportunity, leading to permanent political and religious negotiation.

However, the information that has been gathered about Alcácer from documents and chronicles relating to the period of Islamic rule nonetheless remains quite scarce. Despite this, the old Alcácer is, in fact, referred to on various occasions from the 10th to the 15th century, demonstrating that its importance in the mediaeval Islamic world did not go unnoticed⁵.

This almost complete silence on the part of the sources relating to Islamic Alcácer may even seem paradoxical, but this may be due to a conflict of interests between the late-Roman native inhabitants of Salacia and the representatives of Islamic power. It is quite probable that an agreement was signed between the Muslim armies and the resident elite of Salacia, which allowed the latter to hold onto their properties provided that they paid taxes to the legal representatives of the Ummayyad Caliphate of Damascus, now installed in Cordoba. However, in 740/50, al-Andalus experienced a climate of war and great instability between Berbers on one side and Arabs on the other, further exacerbated by the fact that, in the east, in the course of the coup that had led to the assassination of the family of the Ummayyad caliph, the capital of the empire had been moved to Baghdad, under the victorious command of the Abassid clan.

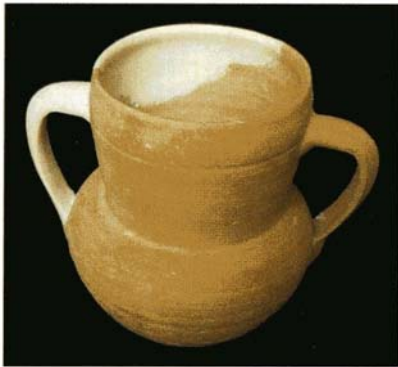
It should be stressed that both the logic of domination and the historical set of circumstances prevailing at that time meant that these territories of the



Fragment of a cooking pot from the emirs-caliph phase (9/10th-century)



Pot from the emirs-caliph phase (9/10th-century)



Pot from the emirs-caliphal phase (9/10th-century)



Gharb were predominantly under the indirect influence of the great economic and cultural centres of al-Andalus: Cordoba, Seville or Toledo. This reality did not, however, prevent the Gharb from gradually gaining its own autonomy. Politically, the pulverisation of centres and the characteristic urban concentration of the Mediterranean civilisations gave the western territories (those of the Gharb) their own identity and a frequently autonomous system of administration. While the golden period of Islamic rule began with the Ummayyad dynasty of Cordoba, in the Gharb, however, there were various rebellious movements⁶, with great political and religious repercussions in the west, accompanied by the political phenomena of independent government.

The early Islamic historians state that Mas'ud b. Abu Danis and his clan, of Berber origin, sought refuge in a fortress known as al-Qasr (Alcácer), around 262H/875-876 A.D., after having been expelled from Coimbra by al-Surunbaqi, a Muslim dissident opposed to the Ummayyad emirate of Cordoba. At that time, at least in military and government terms, the fortress was dependent upon Beja.

Unlike Lisbon, Alcácer was the most important military base for the emirate. The Banu Danis clan, as the loyal representatives of the Ummayyads, developed this fortress and transformed it into the key defensive structure on the Atlantic coast, the Sahil of Beja.

Its potential was not therefore unknown to the clan, since, from such a clearly strategic point, it could reconstitute its power in a period of *fitna*. And this is, in fact, what happened, since according to the "dikr", Lisbon paid taxes to Awsaga Ibn Danis of Alcácer.

Meanwhile, the power in al-Andalus was taken over by a survivor of the house of the Ummayyads, by the name of Abd al-Rahman, who had managed to flee from far-off Syria to the North of Africa, having later succeeded in making his way to the south of Spain. After entering into direct conflict with the already

installed Arabs and Berbers, he managed to impose his rule through a series of successful armed conflicts. The fact that he was also a descendant of the family of the prophet Mohammed also meant that his government would be tolerated by the rival clans, especially by the Yemenites, such as the Banu Matari family for example, who curiously were very well represented in the region comprising what is now the present-day Alentejo and Algarve. After taking over the power in Cordoba, Al-Rahman I became independent from the rest of the Arab empire, but he only adopted the title of emir, maintaining a bond of respect with the new masters installed in present-day Iraq.

As for Alcácer, it is known that the clan continued to govern Alcácer and its surrounding area, from the first "fitna" to the appearance of the Caliphate of Cordoba led by Abd-al-Rahman III. This means that the fortress played a crucial role in the creation of a formula of "feudalism", making it possible for the central power to be accepted as soon as it had succeeded in restructuring itself.

Thereafter, Alcácer do Sal was to gain importance in the territorial framework of the region known as Gharb al-Andalus, or, in other words, the West, becoming known throughout the Islamic world by the name of al-Qasr Abu Danis in the period of the caliphs. It is known that, in 930, the caliph appointed Yahya ibn Abu Danis as governor of Alcácer and his nephew, Abd Allah ibn 'Umar ibn Abu Danis, as governor of the coastal region of Alcácer, separated at that time from Alcácer and probably with its headquarters at *hisn* Balmala, the present-day Palmela Castle. Later, Alcácer was again mentioned by the chroniclers, but now as one of the fortified cities in the area of the *kura* de Baja (present-day Beja).



Cooking pot from the caliphal-taifa phase
(10/11th-century)

5. Amongst the various authors identified so far, we can mention the following: *Ibn al-Qutiya* (10th century), *Ibn Hawqal* (10th century), *Ibn Hayyan* (11th century), *Ibn Hazm* (11th century), *Al-Idrisi* (12th century), *Al Galib* (12th century), *Ibn Idari* (13-14th century), *Abu l-Fida* (13-14th century), *Al-Himyari* (14th century) and *Ibn Abi Zar* (14th century).

6. By way of example, one may mention the rebellion of the Yashubi tribe, which had its roots in Beja (763-774), or the setting up of an independent kingdom in Badajoz promoted by the *muwallad* or *muladi* (i.e. a Christian who had converted to Islam) Ibn Marwan al-Jiliqi (868-889).



General view of the bend in the River Sado from the walls

The role of Alcácer do Sal (10th–11th centuries)

Under the scope of the research work that is currently in progress, we believe that it was the impact of the first Viking attacks on the coast of the Gharb, where Alcácer is located, that would have caught the attention of the central power of the emirate installed in Cordoba, which in turn would have sought to find a suitable response to the new threat. These pillaging incursions, which affected both the Christian kingdoms in the north of the Iberian Peninsula and the Emirate of Cordoba to the south, were to continue into the next centuries. It was, in fact, generally from this city that the reports would be sent to Cordoba informing the leaders there of the sighting of pirate boats.

This fact would seem to indicate that castles such as those at Sesimbra, Palmela or even Santiago de Cacém, played an important role in terms of coastal vigilance and prevention, following the lead given by Alcácer and the guidelines sent out from there.

But, in this phase, from the end of the 9th century to the mid-10th century, the lords of Alcácer were the Banu Danis clan – and history registers the name of al-Qasr Abu Danis as being the name that was given to Alcácer during this period. By the end of the 10th century, however, the clan of the Banu Danis had been removed from the government of the city, perhaps under pressure from Ibn Amir al-Mansor.

In 997, the caliph's famous armada set sail from Alcácer do Sal, joining forces in Porto with the troops that had travelled overland, and, together with their Christian allies in war and pillaging throughout Galicia, they undertook the destruction of the shrine of Santiago de Compostela. In the region of Alcácer, because of the navigability of the Wadi Satubar (*the river of Setúbal*, i.e. the

Sado) as far as Porto Rei roughly 40 kilometres inland from the estuary, there was good access to the abundant pinewoods which provided wood for the making of boats; at the same time, some of the mines that had been worked since Roman times began to be accessible and strengthened the city's economic importance. Close to the river, a naval arsenal and a shipyard were built, benefiting from the region's favourable geographical conditions. The timber was despatched in the form of tree trunks, floated down the river to Alcácer, where they were used for boatbuilding purposes. Iron and copper, which were mined in great abundance in the Alentejo heartland, were used to supply the arsenal, but were also traded by both land and sea. Alcácer once again became a port with an important activity and ever greater interest in military terms, so that there was also a revitalisation of its political energy, playing an important and leading role in both state and regional terms.

The beginning of the 11th century was, so to speak, to signal the end of a period.

A new period began with the gradual decline of the Ummayyad power and the fragmentation of the Cordoban territory, which marked the beginning of the period of the taifa kingdoms. Power was taken by the Aftasid dynasty, which established itself in Badajoz (1022), leading to the later seizure of power by the Abbadids, who established themselves in Seville. Naturally, this successive fragmentation was accompanied by an increase in the autonomy of the cities and, with the growth of the latter, there was greater organisation and subordination of the respective *kuwar* (the rural territory). These movements spread across the whole of the Gharb, once again affording many cities an important regional status.

View of the western section of the walls





Walled enclosure

The archaeological data do not allow us to state with any real safety what the configuration of this settlement was during these years of Islamic control. But it is almost certain that, in architectural terms, and in relation to military architecture in particular, the local Muslim leaders took advantage of part of the Roman walls to build a fairly vast fortification at the top of the hill, planning for its future growth and therefore containing a fair number of empty spaces inside its walls. The initial large-scale investment was channelled into the building of an 8th-century *hisa*, possibly regular in shape, which in turn was successively remodelled and even enlarged. But almost nothing remains from the structure of this older hillside fortress. The population certainly accumulated at the top of the hill in the 8th-9th centuries, with there being a second cluster on the banks of the River Sado. This same overall trend is still to be noted today.

The last centuries of the Islamic occupation of Alcácer (12th-13th centuries)

After the official abolition of the Ummayyad Caliphate of Cordoba in 1030, there was an enormous void in terms of documents relating to the region of Alcácer. It is likely that, given the importance that the city and its naval base had in the political context of the Caliphate, in its fight against the interests of the Fatimid Caliphate in Morocco, which required an ocean port with a vocation for shipbuilding and offering a rapid outlet for troop movements, Alcácer became an autonomous city in much the same way as Lisbon had done. In fact the silence of the documentary sources about this first phase of the taifa period is a good indication of the likelihood of this situation.

It was in the course of the violent war between the taifas of Badajoz and Seville that the elites of the city of Alcácer found themselves obliged to opt for one or other of the kingdoms. It is likely that the preference was for Badajoz, because in this way the city would continue to enjoy an important set of economic and administrative privileges, which it wouldn't have had if it were annexed by Seville, since this city would compete against Alcácer in its sphere of activity.

Its position as a military base was reinforced after the annexation of al-Andalus by the Almoravid Emirate. At this phase of the Islamic occupation of the region, Alcácer's defensive structure was maintained and reinforced by the Almoravids in their *jihad* programme. Al-Idrisi referred to the existence of a vast military region of the *taghr* type, with its headquarters in al-Qasr (Alcácer), which covered a vast territory, including such important cities as Évora, Badajoz, Cáceres, Cória and Alcântara. The same al-Idrisi described the city in a suggestive way:

"Al-Qasr is a beautiful city, of average size, bathed by the waters of the narh Sh.tûb.r [River Setúbal], a great river that can be navigated by a large number of boats and ships used for [ocean] voyages. All of the territory around the city is covered with pine forests, from which the timber is extracted for the building of vessels. The region is fertile in food production and is abundant in milk, butter, honey and meat. From the city to the ocean it is twenty miles and, to Évora, two days."

The Almoravid military failure against the Christian advance in al-Andalus and the need to transfer troops to Morocco to resist the advance of the Almohads meant that there was a power vacuum in al-Andalus. This was quickly filled by the Andalusian elites, who created a series of small kingdoms that fought amongst themselves, sometimes forming alliances with the Christian kingdoms.

But the Christian raids were beginning to cause damage and the territory under Islamic rule – always more organic than "State-like" – started to shrink, even in the period of its greatest resistance during the Almoravid dynasty. In



General view of the castle from the west

the year when a charter was awarded to Coimbra (1111), the power of the Christians in the north of the country was largely unified under the rule of Count Henry of Burgundy. The Christians, spurred on by their religious beliefs, continued their inexorable advance. As a reaction, the Almohad movement came into being at this time and the territory was plunged into a permanent war situation, except for its southern part – the present-day Algarve. The troops led by Henry's son, the fearsome Ibn Erik (Henriques) of the Arab chronicles, the future Afonso I of Portugal, continued their devastating attacks. After the conquest of both Santarém and Lisbon in 1147, the Christians tried to capture all the great Islamic centres and the spread of the war was particularly unfavourable to the Muslims. In 1165, Évora was conquered. In 1179, the independence of Portugal was recognised, the whole region setting itself up as a state and organising its own armies. The Almohad reaction was sporadic, reaching its climax in 1190.

After the conquest of the cities of Santarém and Lisbon, Alcácer do Sal found itself in a border zone, forming a frontier between the Arab territories to the

south and the Christian territories to the north. Around 1147/1148, Afonso Henriques conquered Almada (Almadan), but he did not continue his advance. It was in this somewhat confused phase in terms of its historical evolution that Alcácer appeared as an independent taifa kingdom, under the command of Ali al-Wahibi. This military leader originating from Tavira had been invited to take over by the Alcácer elite because he was an ally of Dom Afonso Henriques. He had a naval fleet and had no family roots in the city and region of Alcácer. He was, however, to be assassinated shortly afterwards in al-Qasr, leading to the Portuguese conquering the city in 1160.

This first Christian presence here, of which there are unfortunately no archaeological traces, was to last 30 years up to the Almohad conquest of 1191, led by the caliph Ya'qub al-Mansor.

Despite the fact that the Almohad presence in the region only lasted 26 years, it is from this phase that we have the largest set of archaeological documents about the city's Islamic phase. It is therefore quite probable that the current appearance of the walled enclosure, or what remains of it, is the result of building work that was undertaken at the orders of the Almohad caliph. The military stability thus obtained, leading the Christians to retreat northwards, certainly allowed for the reformulation of the fortress or the older Arab *hisa*, in what was a clear attitude of regal propaganda on the part of the new caliphal power. Al-Qasr grew in strategic importance and was transformed into a *medina-ribat*, in other words into a walled city with an active garrison, capable of directing the *jihād* or Holy War. The name of the city was to gain a new title: that of al-Qasr al-Fath, which meant Alcácer of the Victory.



Fragment of decorated ceramics from the Almohad period, probably originating from Murcia (1191/1217)



Fragment of ceramics with stamped decoration from the Almohad period (1191/1217)




Fragment of ceramics with stamped decoration
from the Almohad period (1191/1217)



From the data that are now available, we can even state that it was in this phase that Alcácer enjoyed considerable military and economic power. Its position as the northernmost Atlantic city of the Almohad Caliphate enabled it to dominate the last navigable stretch of the River Sado. Furthermore, it served as an extremely calm and safe haven for an impressive number of coastal vessels that in this way gained access to the grain produced in the region's fields. The city had a riverside quarter that welcomed fishermen and traders, whilst the fortress and farmhouses were situated at the top of the hill. There were several watchtowers to the north.

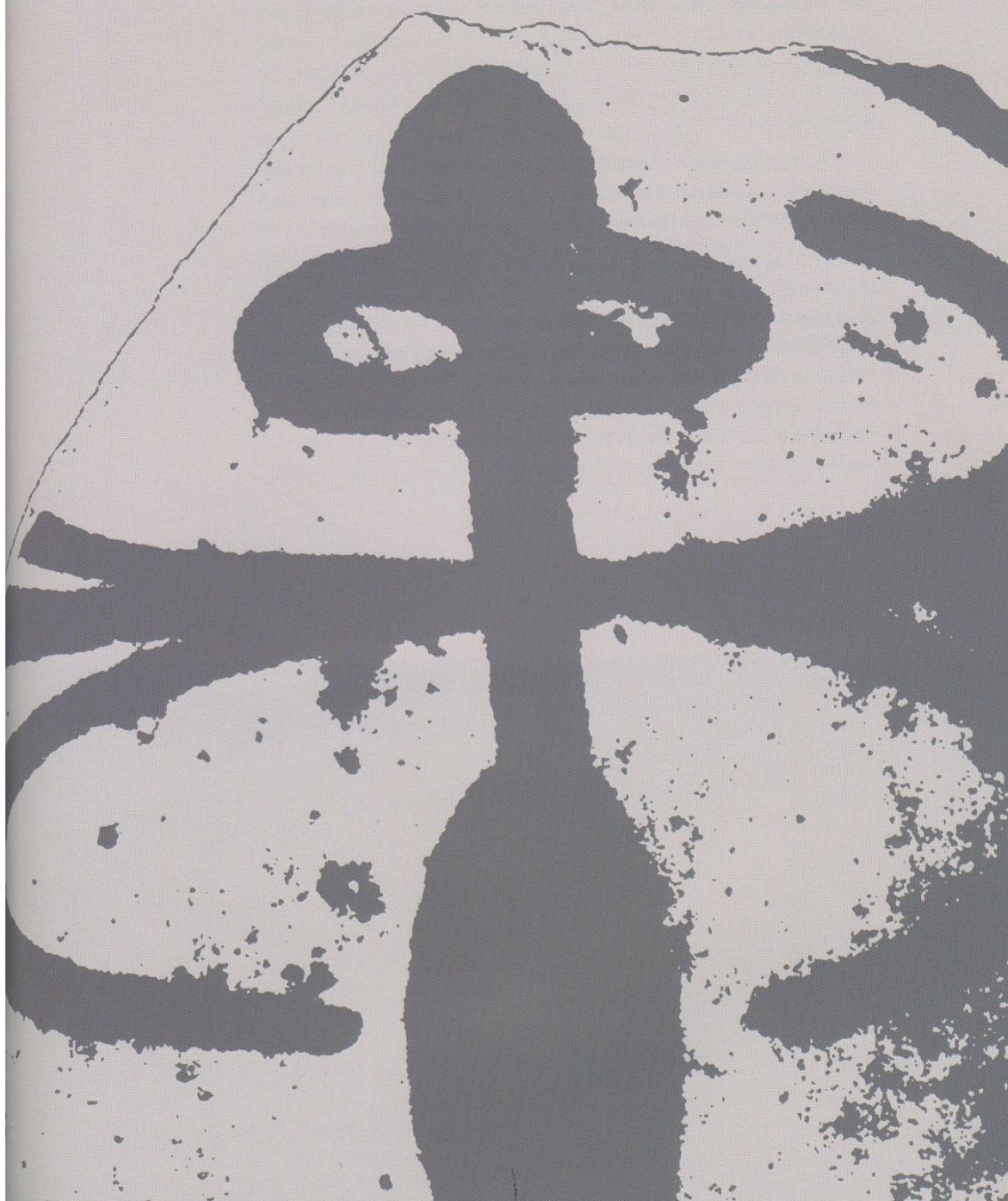
Almost nothing has been left of other buildings, except for a few remains of tombstones. Nonetheless, attention is drawn to two white marble capitals attributed to the period of the emirate (9th-10th centuries), which are kept at the Pedro Nunes Municipal Museum. The larger of the two capitals, which is quite generous in size (39.5 centimetres high with a diameter of 50 centimetres at its widest point) has the classical style decoration of a Corinthian order, with two rows of leaves, with their stems and veins carved in relief with

a curved chisel. Each side of the capital has a shell-shaped motif at the top. Because of its morphology, it is distinct from other white marble capitals. The other one with a narrow tambour is in the Arab tradition; nonetheless, the capital's basket maintains the classical proportions and the type of ornamentation that point towards the Mozarab tradition. The possibility of the capitals having formed part of a Christian church built under Arab rule is therefore not to be excluded, or they may be from an older version of the Igreja de Santa Maria do Castelo, which is quite probable.

In relation to the cosmopolitan and more heavily populated city of Lisbon, Alcácer do Sal could be said to play a symmetrical role in the south to the one that was played by the city of Santarém to the north. It is therefore not surprising that the Portuguese saw the conquest of this city as one of the priorities of their military campaign. 



Mediaeval and Christian Alcácer do Sal



MEDIAEVAL AND CHRISTIAN ALCÁÇER DO SAL

The historical evolution of the Portuguese presence in Alcácer is a clear reflection of the extreme complexity that was involved in the conquest of this military fortress between the late 12th and early 13th centuries.

It was not enough just to conquer a city that had an important strategic position and possessed a vast territory filled with valuable resources. It was essential to keep it operational, in such a way that this military base could be linked to a much broader network for the defence of the kingdom of Portugal against the Islamic threat.

The Christian presence was marked by a first phase that began with the first conquest in 1160 and ended in 1191. The roughly 30 years that this stage lasted left an almost invisible trail in terms of archaeological documentation.

In order to be able to correctly assess this conquest, it is important to think about what type of Medina was conquered and what archaeological documentation has remained that can explain that presence. In fact, until quite recently, the vast majority of researchers into the century that have referred to this first Portuguese conquest of Islamic territory have normally based themselves on Christian historical sources rather than Islamic ones. However, if we carry out a combined study of both sources, the conclusions that can be drawn are different and more enlightening.

Walled enclosure



The Alcácer Region in the late 12th century

The conquest of Lisbon in 1147 by Dom Afonso Henriques took place against what, for the Muslims, was a fairly confused and dramatic background in the Iberian Peninsula. Faced with the military pressure caused by the Almohad rebellion in North Africa, the central Almoravid power was forced to take unpopular economic measures and withdraw troops from al-Andalus, which until then had been vital in withstanding the advance of the Peninsular Christian kingdoms.

With the worsening of the Almoravid power vacuum, there was a sudden outbreak of reforming movements, expressed most clearly in the military rebellion in Gharb al-Andalus. It was against this complex background that Ibn Wazir was to appear, the Almoravid governor who had installed himself in Évora and given his support to Ibn Qasi, becoming politically independent of the central Almoravid power. He rapidly annexed Beja and brought some political and administrative cohesion to a vast territory that, in this phase, also included Alcácer.

According to some Muslim sources, Ibn Wazir had formed an alliance with Dom Afonso Henriques and it was this that prevented him from helping the Muslim population in Lisbon. Despite the gaps in available sources, an analysis of the Islamic elites in relation to the existing power in each region and to the way this was expressed by those who had assumed it, if such a thing was legitimate in relation to the *umma*, makes it possible to draw a coherent picture



of the evolution of events at that time. And, seen from this perspective and based on some documentary references, it can be considered possible that Alcácer had gained autonomy as a taifa kingdom and was independent of the power of Ibn Wazir, precisely at a time when the power of this regional leader was under attack in a variety of ways.

In relation to this particular situation, mention should be made of the invitation that the Alcácer elite addressed to Ali al-Wahibi, the military leader in Tavira to become the sovereign of the city. The inhabitants of Alcácer knew that Ali Wahibi was an ally of Dom Afonso Henriques and this fact enabled him to relieve the Portuguese pressure on this territory. For the first Portuguese king, the presence of this Muslim ally to the south of Lisbon provided him with valuable revenue and afforded military security along the southern frontier, avoiding the possibility of a direct confrontation with the Almohad power that was meanwhile fighting in al-Andalus against the Iberian kingdoms and gradually annexing the taifa kingdoms.

It was probably the excessive taxes that were demanded by the Portuguese king that led to the military revolt in Alcácer and Ali Wahibi's assassination at the end of 1159 or the beginning of 1160, and it may have been this set of circumstances that made it possible for the Christians to advance further, leading finally to the Portuguese conquest of Alcácer in 1160, with the support of the crusaders who had meanwhile landed in Lisbon.

Based on the Portuguese sources that refer to the conquests of the castles in the Arrábida region in 1165, it may be believed that, after its conquest in 1160, Alcácer remained as a Christian enclave in an Islamic space. This political and



Fragments of decorated ceramics from the Almohad period, associated to "dry rope technique". Typical production from Baleares Islands – Palma de Maiorca (1191-1215)



'Albarrã taipa' watchtower

military situation did not, however, last for very long. The Islamic recovery took place in 1191 at the orders of the Almohad caliph Ya'qub al-Mansur. Contrary to the opinion of many authors who tend to belittle the importance of the Medina of Alcácer in the Almohad context, the archaeological documentation that has been found in excavations inside the castle enclosure has shown the existence of an important military and naval fortress that successfully managed to slow down the Portuguese advance southwards, thanks to an efficient and coherent system for the defence of its territory on the estuary and in the region of Palha.

From an early date, therefore, the Portuguese military power understood that this city could only be conquered through a combination of terrestrial and naval forces, just as had happened with the Almohad power and would effectively be the case with the Christian recovery of this city.

The conquest of Alcácer was finally achieved in 1217, with the help of roughly half of the forces involved in the Fifth Crusade who were heading eastwards, and this fortress did, in fact, become the only one that remained in Christian power after this campaign.

Alcácer after the Christian conquest of 1217

The conquest of al-Qasr al-Fath (Alcácer) was an enormously important feat in its time, so much so that the crusaders who took part in it had asked for papal dispensation from the need to go east. The Pope recognised the importance of what they had achieved but reiterated that the crusaders' mission was in Palestine and not in Hispania. He did, however, grant them some months' stay, so that they could help repair Alcácer's defensive wall system.

Excavations undertaken, as part of the necessary consolidation work, on the castle's northern slope enabled archaeologists to discover that the barbican had not been completely repaired, but that a small mound of earth had been erected around it. A skeleton was found in this part of the site, buried in accordance with Islamic rites.

This fact makes it possible to suggest that there was an alteration in the city's defensive strategy, probably due to insufficient resources for totally repairing the Almohad defensive system. Such a fact seems to be visible in the likely deactivation of the Almohad defences, as the archaeological work suggests.

A frontier zone seems to have been established to the south of Alcácer, which would be maintained for two decades and staved off the Portuguese advance.

Quadrangular 'taipa' tower





Aljube tower

This situation would certainly not be unrelated to the decision taken immediately after the conquest of 1217 to install the headquarters of the Order of Santiago (St. James) in Portugal in the citadel of Alcácer castle. Nonetheless, in terms of archaeological documentation, very little 13th-century pottery was found inside the castle.

The Order of Santiago was created in the manner of the military-religious Orders of the Temple or the Knights Templar, and of St. John of Jerusalem or the Knights Hospitaller. Its creation during a period of heavy Christian attack on Islamic positions was the initiative of noble knights who, under the command of Dom Pedro Fernandez, had set up the brotherhood in Cáceres in 1170, immediately becoming known at that time as the *Fratres de Cáceres*. Since their purpose was to join in the crusade against the infidels, they were incorporated under the archbishopric of Santiago de Compostela, adopting St. James as their patron saint. However, their territorial scope was exclusively Iberian, or, in other words, despite the various attempts that they made, they did not extend their activities into the Holy Land.

It is known from documents that, in 1172, they were to be found in Portugal and had begun to take part in decisive military campaigns to conquer territory from the Muslims. Their action in support of the Portuguese crown was fundamental in the country's expansion to the south of the River Tagus, where they were to be given most of their land and the governorship of the most important castles. Having become established with a convent in Lisbon, at

Santos-o-Novo, as early as 1194 or shortly afterwards, they played a leading role in the affairs of that time, although their presence was not without conflict since the Order's mastership was based in Castile. In the first dynasty, there were various disagreements between the Portuguese crown and the knights of Santiago – or at least with the "head" of the Order, especially during the 13th century. The Order was kept highly dependent on the crown and the election of the Portuguese masters was preceded by royal approval. The wealth of the Order of Santiago obliged the crown to control the congregation, preventing any excessive use of feudal power. In the end, the king Dom Dinis decided to nationalise the Order of Santiago, a measure that was recognised by Pope Nicholas IV in 1288, although this decision was later reversed, under Pope Celestine V, who placed the order under Castilian command once more. But the separation of the Portuguese chapter was made definitive in 1314, when the Portuguese knights elected Dom Lourenço Eanes as their leader with the support of the king. The discussion about the order's national constitution dragged on for a long time and was only resolved in 1452.

For much of the Low Middle Ages, Alcácer was the most important establishment of the knights of Santiago, although they already included amongst their assets the then hisn of Palmela, which had been reconquered in 1194. Having been involved in the reconquest of Alcácer in 1217, they were given both the fortress and its respective land. These were joined by the castles of Almada (1218), Sesimbra and Mértola (1239), as well as Aljafar de Pena and Ayamonte, both now in Spanish territory. Alcácer was in fact the Order's headquarters from 1217 to 1442, with a somewhat unclear interregnum between 1239 and 1284, the period during which Mértola took over the responsibility for the military component of the knights of Santiago. In 1442, the headquarters were definitively transferred to Palmela, through a royal decision taken by Dom João II. This fact contributed to a sharp decline in the city's influence over the region, leading over the following centuries to its gradually being replaced in importance by Setúbal, as a result of enduring consequences of a social, demographic, administrative and economic nature.

For this reason, Alcácer has more expressive archaeological records for the 14th and 15th centuries. Despite the transfer of the Order's military branch to Mértola for part of the 13th century, even though its headquarters remained in Alcácer, the Santiago militia was always an important presence in this city and left marks that are still visible today. Certainly the area's military condition, being at one extreme of the region or effectively a border territory, seriously affected the choices taken with regard to the implantation of the Order's members.

Although now greatly ruined and, in some sections, profoundly changed, the architecture of Alcácer do Sal's military fortifications still reveals some signs of the earlier Muslim structures of the 12th century, even bearing in mind the rebuilding work that had been undertaken after the second Christian con-



Arch of the façade of the citadel palace

quest in 1217 and beginning in the reign of Dom Afonso II, especially with the establishment and maintenance of the headquarters of the Order of Santiago. Effectively, there were certainly some sections of the Almohad fortress that could be partly reused, the same thing happening with the residence of the Muslim governor. And the repairs begun by the crusaders immediately after the reconquest were certainly based on the Islamic layout.

In the Almohad period, immediately before the Christian reconquest, a series of innovations had been introduced in the field of military architecture. In fact, the Almohad aims were based on an aggressive policy of military occupation, obviously imposing consequent requirements in terms of greater fortification, which explains the period of castle building, or the remodelling of already existing ones, with adaptations that had already been tried out in other fortress. Amongst the systems that were adopted almost systematically by the Almohads was the use of the so-called "military taipa", the building of isolated watchtowers and polygonal towers, as well as the remodelling of the residences within the citadels, which despite the austere guidelines of the movement, were improved and even enlarged since they almost always represented a good rhetorical device in the display of power by the new lords of the manor. Meanwhile, the fortresses built for the defence of the coastal and river regions were the ones on which work was undertaken first. Naturally, these castles included Alcácer, but also Faro, Tavira, Loulé, Salir, Albufeira, Lagos, Mértola and even Paderne. The system of watchtowers was fundamental in ensuring the fulfilment of the Almohad military aims and it is now known, through archae-

ological finds and the analysis of the place names that, in the region of Alcácer and the Setúbal Peninsula alone, a network of watchtowers was set up, with it being likely that such towers existed in Creiro (Arrábida), Atalaia (Serra de Grândola), Penha (between Alcácer and Santiago do Cacém), São Lourenço, Serra da Palma, Serrinha, Arrábida, Marateca, Serra da Maceira and Serra das Alcáçovas. All of these places were visible from Alcácer, and some of them made it possible to form triangles of vigilance with the fortresses of Balmala (Palmela) and Cacém. These were places that allowed for surveillance of the coast, of course, but also of the bay of Setúbal and the River Sado itself. A *ribat/musala* from this period has also been identified in Torrão.

The walled enclosure of Alcácer, with two sections that encircled the hill to the north and south, and which, in reality, surrounded the settlement itself very probably began to include between the 12th and 13th centuries the thirty defensive towers mentioned by the chroniclers and historians, most of which have either disappeared or fallen into ruins. Almost all of them were quadrangular in shape.



View of a section of the walls and the citadel palace tower



Fragment of a decorated jug from the Almohad period, with brown slip (1191-1217)

One of these towers, south-facing and located on the hillside sloping down to the river, was undoubtedly built by the Moors. It is slightly separated from the walled enclosure and is made of "military" taipa. The marks are perfectly visible of the wooden boards that were used as the formwork for holding the taipa or dry mud of the tower's walls in place. It also displays one of the characteristic features of Muslim military constructions from the 12th to the 13th centuries, the period when taipa was used as the main building material: narrow parallel and perpendicular bands, limewashed and imitating the design of the great ashlar blocks, so as to simulate a powerful-looking construction made of hewn stone. As it stood separate from the wall, this may have been a watchtower, representing yet another feature of the Islamic identity of the fortress prior to its Christian remodelling, but nonetheless incorporated into the new structure.

Other towers seem to be the result of building work undertaken during the Almohad period. One of them, in the section of wall facing north-east, offers us a building design that is also Islamic in nature: this is the quadrangular Torre do Algique (referring to an *aljibe* or cistern), reinforced and thickened at its base by four sloping sections. The south-facing section of the wall is badly eroded and practically all that now remains is the lowest part and the projecting bases of the towers placed around the perimeter of the enclosure, most notably, along the south-west front, the clock tower, which was rebuilt in the 17th century.


The towers in the wall that were restored are crowned with crenellations. This system of protection and preparation of the battlements or the walk along the ramparts must have been extended to the whole of the fortified enclosure, although today most of its perimeter is missing. The restoration work undertaken during the 1970s concentrated on reconstruction after the more

aggressive campaigns undertaken during the 1950s and 1960s, which had led to the demolition of sections of the wall made of taipa that were in danger of turning into ruins. The more recent restorations have led to the reconfiguration of the towers by filling in the gaps, either with taipa or with stones used in such a way that their coating gives the appearance of taipa, or even with cement binding. The final result is not always entirely successful, despite achieving an acceptable reprofiling and reinstatement of the wall's shape in certain sections.

Still today – or particularly today – the most visible and monumental face of the walled enclosure is the one that faces west. It is also the one that stands atop one of the largest and most conspicuous slopes of the great hill on which the castle was built. On this side, two symmetrical towers, slender and crowned by battlements, frame a façade composed of a large semi-circular arch, with a recessed span. Under the arch is a row of seven narrow arched windows, with another two windows placed above them. This arrangement, despite the remodelling work that has taken place over time, together with the annexation of this section of the walls by the convent, is reminiscent of certain monumental façades of the main entrances of fortified enclosures from the Almohad period (as, for example, the Bab Agraw (Marrakesh) or the Bab al-Wudayya (Ribat al-Fath/Rabat), although the one in Alcácer no longer has any operational military gate at the ground floor level, either because of such a structure possibly having been walled up, probably because it was a work of propaganda designed in keeping with the taste of Yakub al-Mansur and did not have any access from the inside.

However, it must be understood that it was against this part of the walls that the palace from the Almohad period was built. This thereafter became the residential area of the headquarters of the Order of Santiago, which took advantage of the structure and remodelled it. It is in fact likely that the residence of the *caid*, both prior to its becoming the residence of the friars, was built on the defensive quadrilateral from the Islamic period, which hypothetically existed between the 9th and 10th centuries, the *hishn* of al-Qasr.

In its turn, the convent seems to have been installed some centuries later in the empty shell that had survived from this building, continuing to occupy in the area of the castle the same built area in terms of height that had been inherited from mediaeval times, presumably from the 12th to the 13th centuries. Alcácer's loss of military importance from the 14th century onwards, exacerbated by the moving of the headquarters of the Order of Santiago to Palmela, led to this residence gradually falling into disuse.

Nowadays, with the restoration work that has been undertaken on the convent and its reuse as a *pousada*, what we now see is a series of relatively imposing volumes shaping the landscape of Alcácer, recalling and, in some ways, recreating the certainly massive appearance of the *hishn* and the Almohad residence that followed on from it. 

CHRONOLOGY (3000 b.C. - 926 A.D.)

b.C.

3000 - 2500

Probable Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlement of the hill of Alcácer

800 - 500

Iron Age settlement. The village on the hill of Alcácer grew and probably took the name of *Beuipo*. Probable establishment in the region of Phoenician settlers

500 - 200

Intensification of the commercial trade with East Mediterranean. The settlement began to develop a definite structure

c.100

Probable minting of local coins

A.D.

150 b.C. - 50 A.D.

Beginning of the Romanisation process in the west of the Iberian Peninsula

100 b.C. - 100 A.D.

Romanisation of the settlement. Urbanisation. The settlement took the name of *Salacia*

100 - 350

Salacia

350 - 600

Decline of the civitas of *Salacia*. Strengthening of the rural component and decline of maritime trade.

622

Mohammed emigrates from Mecca. Beginning of Hegira (Islamic calendar)

711 - 755

Islamic Occupation and Conquest

711

Beginning of the campaign of Tariq in the Iberian Peninsula: first Muslim conquests

741

Berber rebellion in Gharb al-Andalus

756 - 929

Independent Emirate

756

Beginning of the Ummayyad Emirate with its headquarters in Cordoba (Abd-al-Rahman I)

763 - 766

Rebellion of the Abassids in Baja (Beja); the rebellion spreads over the Gharb

843

Norman attacks on the Gharb (Lisbon, Beja, Algarve, Seville)

875 - 876

Mas'ud b. Abu Danis seeks refuge with his clan in al-Qasr; Alcácer begins to be known as al-Qasr Abu Danis

889 - 890

Hermenegildo Guterres conquers Coimbra

912

Abd al-Rahman III takes power

926

Abd al-Rahman III unifies the Gharb and proclaims himself caliph; Caliphate of Cordoba

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CHRONOLOGY (929 A.D. - 1250 A.D.)

A.D.

929 - 1031	930	961	966	987
Independent Caliphate, rival of the Fatimid and Abassid Caliphates	The caliph appoints Yahya ibn Abu Danis governor of al-Qasr	Al Hakam II takes power	Norman attack on the Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula	Al Mansur conquers Coimbra, Leon and Zamora
997	end of 10th century	1009	1013	1022
Islamic fleet attacks Santiago de Compostela. The expedition was prepared at Alcácer do Sal	The Abu Danis clan is removed from the government of al-Qasr	Rebellion in Cordoba	The taifa kingdoms appear	Badajoz becomes the seat of power of the Aftasid Berber dynasty
1022 - 1023	1029	1031-1095	1039	
Abbadid rule begins in Seville	The Ummayyad caliphate of Cordoba comes to an end	First taifa Kingdoms phase	The Abbadids conquer Lisbon and Mértola	
1056	1070	1073 - 1079	1093 - 1095	
Fernando I of Castile conquers Badajoz, Lamego and Viseu	Beginning of the Almoravid conquests	Development of the shipyard at Alcácer do Sal	End of the taifa kingdom of Badajoz. The Almoravids conquer Lisbon	
1102-1142	1143	1147	1151	1151-1228
Almoravid Period	Afonso Henriques is recognised as king of Portugal	Afonso Henriques conquers Santarém and Lisbon	Attempt is made by the Christians to conquer Alcácer do Sal	Almohad Period

1154	1160	1179	1184	
Alcácer becomes an independent <i>taifa</i> kingdom under the command of Ali al-Wahibi	Ali al-Wahibi is assassinated. Christian conquest of Alcácer	Islamic attack on Lisbon	Beginning of the Almohad expansion in the Gharb, Islamic reconquest of Southern Portugal. First reference to Torrão (<i>hisn turus</i>) appears in text written by Ibn Idari (al-Bayan)	
1189 - 1191	1191	1195	end of 10th century	1211
Almohad attacks on Silves, Torres Novas, Tomar, Almada, Alcácer and Palmela	Alcácer is conquered by the Almohads	Almohad victory at Alarcos	The name of Alcácer is registered as al-Qasr al-Fath. Almohad architectural reforms are made to the palace of the citadel and the city walls	Reign of Dom Afonso II
1212	1217	1223	1230 - 1234	1236 - 1237
Battle of Navas de Tolosa. Fall of the Almohads in the Gharb	Christian conquest of Alcácer do Sal	Reign of Dom Sancho II	Christian conquest of Mérida, Badajoz, Juromenha, Serpa, Moura, Beja and Aljustrel	Conquest of Cordoba
1238 - 1242	1249	1250		
Conquest of Mértola, Caceia, Tavira, Alvor and Paderne	Dom Afonso III conquers Faro. End of Islamisation in Gharb al-Andalus. First documentary reference to Santa Catarina de Sítimos (<i>Setimus</i>) and also to Alberge (Vale de Reis)	First documentary reference to Palma		

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